

THE FIELD OF HONOR

I

OLD Eph's favorite stand was on Tremont street, just outside the subway kiosk, where every foot in Boston soon or late must pass. He appeared here about dusk every evening, when the afternoon rush was over; and he squatted, tailor fashion, on crossed legs, and hugged his banjo to his ragged breast, and picked at it and crooned and shouted his old melodies so long as there were any to listen. He was a cheerful old fellow, with the pathetic cheerfulness of the negro. When coins were tossed to him, he had a nimble trick of whisking his banjo bottom side up, catching the contribution in this improvised receptacle, flipping it into the air and pocketing it without interrupting his music. Each time he did this, his fingers returned to the strings with a sweep and a strumming that suggested the triumphant notes of trumpets. There was an ape-like cast to his head; and his long arms and limber old fingers had the uncanny dexterity of a monkey. Pretty girls, watching him, sometimes said shiveringly to their escorts:

"He hardly seems human—squatting there. . ."

Old Eph always heard. His ears were unnaturally keen, attuned to the murmur of the crowds. And he used to answer them, chanting his reply

in time with the tune he happened at the moment to be playing. Thus: "Don' you cry, ma Honey . . ." might become:

" 'Don' you call me monkey,
 'Don' you call me monk . . .
 'Eph ain' gwine tuh lak it, and hit ain't so. . . . ' "

And then he would go on with the song, calm and undisturbed . . .

" 'All de little black babies, sleepin' on de flo' . . .
 'Mammy only lubs her own. ' "

When a particularly liberal coin came his way, he gave thanks in the midst of his song. Thus:

" 'I'm comin'; I'm comin'; and my head is thank ye
 ma'am . . .
 'I hear dem darky voices calling: Yes mum-ma'am. ' "

He never hesitated to take liberties with the English language in order to preserve the meter; for he had the keen sense of rhythm that characterizes his race. Also, for all the ravages of age, his voice was sweet and true. He sang endlessly, so that his songs were half medley, half monologue; and his banjo would all but speak for him.

No one ever saw Eph about the streets in the day time. He appeared at dusk; and it was known that he sometimes remained at his post, singing and picking at his banjo, long after the ways were empty of pedestrians. Sometimes, in those middle hours between night and morning, when there was no one near, the songs he sang became ineffably sad and mournful; he crooned them, under

his breath, to the banjo that he hugged against his breast, and his sweet old voice was like a low lament. Once Walter Ragan, the patrolman on the beat, passed at four in the morning of a late fall day and heard Eph singing, over and over . . .

"Tramp, tramp, tramp! De boys is marching. . . ."

Eph repeated this song so long and so sorrowfully that Ragan came up quietly behind him and asked:

"What's the matter, Eph?"

The old negro looked up, and Ragan saw that there were tears on his black and wrinkled cheeks. But the darky grinned cheerfully at sight of the policeman.

"Jes' thinkin' on de old times, Mist' Ragan. Thinkin' on de old times, suh," said Eph.

Ragan was half inclined to laugh, and half inclined to cry. He felt so sorry for the old man that he ordered him gruffly to get up and go home and go to bed. And Eph got up, and bowed, and brushed the paving with his cap, so deep was his obeisance. "Yas, suh, Mist' Ragan," he promised. "Yas, suh, I'm goin' right along. . . ."

And he tucked the banjo under his arm, and crossed the street, and started up Beacon Hill. Ragan knew where he dwelt, down in the swarming hive beneath the Hill. He watched old Eph go, watched the shuffling, splay feet, and the bent shoulders, and the twisted, crooked little body . . .

"The darned old nut," said Ragan gruffly, to himself. "Not sense enough to go to bed . . ."

And he went on down the street, whistling be-

tween his teeth and trying not to think of Eph's bowed body and the tears upon the black old cheeks.

II

Eph's songs, in the old days, were simple darky ballads, or lullabys, or the songs of the southland that all the world knows. People sometimes brought their children, of an evening, just to hear Eph sing: "Don' You Cry, Ma Honey . . ." or that fearsome lullaby about the "Conju' cats. . . ." When the old man was in good voice, he never failed to gather a little audience about him. His listeners used to call out and ask him to sing certain songs that were their favorites; and sometimes Eph sang what they wished to hear, and sometimes he refused. He would never sing "Dixie." "I ain' no slave nigger," he was accustomed to protest, with scorn. "I fit ag'in' de South, in de big war. Rackon I'm gwine sing dat song? Lawdy, man, no suh."

They told him, laughingly, that the war was over. "Da's all right," he agreed. "De war's over. Mebbe so. But I ain' over. Not me. An' long as I is what I is, I don' sing no rebelliums. No suh."

Those who had enough curiosity to make inquiries found that Eph told the truth when he said he had fought for the North. He had served in that colored regiment whose black ranks are immortalized in the Shaw Memorial, opposite the State House, just up the hill from where Eph had his nightly stand; and he carried his discharge

papers in a tattered old wallet in his tattered coat. . . . By the same token, though he would never sing "Dixie," it required no more than a word to start him off on that mighty battle hymn, "Mine eyes have seen the glory . . ." When he sang this, his voice rolled and throbbed and thrummed with a roar like the roar of drums, and there was the beat of marching feet in the cadence of his song. His banjo tinkled shrilly as the piping of the fifes, and his bent shoulders straightened, and his head flung high, and his old eyes snapped and shone. . . .

When Europe went to war, Eph little by little forsook the gentler melodies of his repertoire; he chose songs with a martial swing. He chose them by ear and by words; and when he sang them, there was the blare of bugles in his voice. He was, from the beginning, violently anti-German; and now and then, when his enthusiasm overcame him, he delivered an oration on the subject to his nightly audience. At which they laughed.

But if it was a joke to them, it was not funny to Eph; and he proved this when the United States went into the war. He went, unostentatiously, to the recruiting office and offered himself to the country.

The Sergeant in charge did not smile at old Eph, because he saw that Eph himself was deadly serious. Eph had said simply:

"I've come to jine up in de army, suh." The Sergeant asked:

"You mean you want to enlist."

Eph nodded, and grinned. "Yas suh, jes dat."

The Sergeant frowned, and he considered. "I'll

tell you, old man," he said. "I'm afraid you're over the age limit."

"Whut de age limit?" Eph asked cautiously.

"Forty-five."

Eph cackled with delight. "I declare, dat jes lets me in. Me, I'm gwine on fo'ty-four, dis minute."

The Sergeant grinned. "Get out!" he protested. "You'll never see seventy-four again."

"I kin prove it," Eph offered.

The other shook his head. "You're too old; and your eyes are no good, and your teeth are gone, and you've got flat-foot . . ."

Eph perceived that the man was friendly. "I can p'int a gun an' pull a trigger," he urged wheedlingly.

"There's more than that to war," the Sergeant told him; and Eph's eyes blazed.

"Whut you know 'bout war, man?" he demanded. "Ain' I been in it. Ain' I slep' in de rain, an' et raw corn, an' fit in mud to de knees, an' got a bullet in my laig, an' laid out in de snow three days till they come an' fotch me in. Don' you let on about war to me, man. I been it and I done it, befo' you uz thought of. Go way!"

Eph was so deadly earnest that the Sergeant's eyes misted. The Sergeant himself knew what it was to grow old. He had a terrible, sneaking fear that they would keep him on such duty as this; that he would never see France. And he crossed, and dropped his hand on Eph's shoulder. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's no go. We can't take you."

Eph passed from anger to pleading. "Spouse'n

"I uz to go along an' sing to um," he proposed. "I e'd do that, anyways."

"No. They wouldn't allow you . . ."

"I'm a jim dandy cook," Eph offered pitifully.

The Sergeant had to swear or weep. He swore. "Get out of here, you damned old scamp," he exclaimed, and swept Eph toward the door. "Get out of here and stay out, or I'll have you run in. . . ."

And Eph, who knew white folks and their ways as well as the slave niggers he scorned, understood that this was the Sergeant's way of telling him there was no hope at all. So he said simply: "Thank'e, sir." And he turned, and with a sad and dreary dignity he went out, and down the stairs to the street, and up the Hill and down to the little room where he lodged.

He was alone in his room all that day. The woman who kept the boarding house, a billowy negress with a pock-marked face, heard little moaning cries and lamentations coming from behind his closed door; and once she knocked and offered her comfort, but Eph drove her away with hard words, and nursed his sorrow alone.

That night, some of those who saw him at his stand by the subway kiosk thought he looked tired; but he was as gay as ever, and as cheerful. He made one innovation in his singing. Across the street and above his head rose the spire of the Park street church. Whenever the hands of the clock in this spire touched the hour, old Eph rose, and took off his hat, and lifted up his voice and sang:

"'Oh say, kin you see . . .'"

He sang this each hour that evening, and each hour in all the evenings that were to come, until the end. And at first they scoffed a little, because they thought he was playing patriotism for his own ends; but when they saw how earnestly he sang, and felt the wistful tenderness in his tones, they faintly understood, and more respected him.

When Ragan came on duty, shortly after midnight that night, he thought old Eph looked sick, and he sent the old man home.

III

It was Ragan, in the end, who brought Jim Forrest to see Eph. Forrest was a reporter on one of the daily papers. He was unlike the reporter of fiction, in that he was neither a "cub" nor a "star." He was just plain reporter, with a nose for news, and human sympathy, and some ability as a writer. He was a young fellow twenty-two or three years old. His father died just as he finished college, and Jim of necessity gave up law school and buckled down to earn a living for his mother and himself. The newspaper business seldom pays enormous salaries; but there is no other profession in which a green man can earn so much. Jim began on a salary of fifteen dollars a week, and at the end of his first year was raised to twenty. At the same time they put him on the night shift at police headquarters.

When Jim was earning fifteen dollars a week, he and his mother lived, and that was about all. For they had been accustomed to five or six thousand a year before Mr. Forrest died; and a dollar

still looked small and unimportant to them. By the time Jim was raised to twenty, Mrs. Forrest had learned to make one dollar do the work of two; and they managed . . . Jim worked hard, and wondered when he could ask for another raise.

But when the United States went into the war, newspapers stopped raising salaries. And the worst of it was that Jim was particularly anxious for more money at that time. The sight of his friends, the young unmarried men among whom his life was laid, decked out in khaki, gave Jim a miserable feeling that was like nothing so much as homesickness. He had a nostalgia for the training camps that was actually physical; it was so acute that it sickened him.

But—there was nothing he could do. If he went, his mother could not live. That was pure mathematics; and when Jim had reluctantly accepted this fact, he set himself to keep a stiff upper lip and stick heroically to the tasks of peace when the cowardly way would have been for him to go to war. He stuck to the tasks of peace, but he did not accept the situation as hopeless. He began to cast about for chances to earn a little extra money, for special stories he might write, for opportunities to earn one of the bonuses that were sometimes awarded for exceptional performance.

He was a likeable boy; he had friends, and they helped him with suggestions. One of these friends was Ragan, and Ragan told Jim one day to go see old Eph.

"There's a story in him, and a big one," he assured Jim. "That old nigger . . . You can

write a yarn about him that will make every man in town cry into his coffee."

Jim knew Eph by sight; he asked Ragan for details.

"Work the patriotic line," Ragan advised him. "D'you know Eph tried to enlist, when we went into the war? Well, he did."

"Is that straight?"

"Sure. Sergeant Hare told me. Said Eph all but cried at being turned down. Offered to go along and sing to the boys, or cook for them . . ."

"Thanks," said Jim. "You know Eph pretty well. Put in a word for me, will you?"

"You're through at four in the morning," Ragan suggested. "He'll probably be around till then. Come up with me, and I'll take you to him."

That was in September, a warm, still night of early fall; and they found old Eph as Ragan had expected, still squatting with his back against the kiosk, still strumming softly, still crooning under his breath as he strummed. The darky looked up sidewise when they came near, and grinned at Ragan, and bobbed his head.

"Howdy, Miste' Ragan," he said.

Ragan chuckled. "Tol'able, Eph," he mimicked. "Get up out of that. This is Jim Forrest, wants to talk to you."

Eph looked at Jim suspiciously. "Howcome?" he asked.

Forrest smiled. "I'm a reporter," he explained. "I want to write something about you. Everyone has seen you; I want to tell them more about you than they've seen."

Eph shook his head stubbornly. "Ol' Eph ain'

gwine git his name in no papers," he protested. "You go 'long, boy, and lemme 'lone."

Jim became grave. He knew the first and strongest weapon in a reporter's armory; the art of making your victim angry. And he knew enough about Eph to hit the old man in a tender spot. "I want to get your story about the way you fought in the Confederate army," he explained.

Eph got to his feet with a menacing swiftness; and he shook his old fist in Jim's face. "Dat's a lie," he said shrilly. "I fit ag'in' de South; an' I kin prove it."

Jim looked puzzled. "Why—aren't you twisted, sir? I understand that you fought for three years, before you were wounded, and that General Lee himself gave you a letter . . ."

Eph boiled, but he controlled his tongue. He studied Jim, leaning closer to look into the young man's eyes. "Y'all know dat ain' right," he said steadily. "Howcome you want to pester an ol' nigger lak me?"

Jim was ashamed of himself, but he stuck to his attack. "I may be mistaken," he confessed. "Maybe they told me wrong . . . Maybe they were trying to start trouble between us, sir. What was the straight of it? Didn't you fight in the war at all?"

Eph tapped Jim slowly on the breast. "Nemmine me," he said slowly. "Nemmine me. Le's talk 'bout you. Howcome you ain' got on one o' dem kharki uniforms, boy? Howcome? Huh?"

The attack was so unexpected; it struck so acutely to the mark that Jim was silenced. But

Ragan took his part; he touched old Eph's arm. "There now, old man," he said. "He's all right. But he's got a mother to support. If he don't take care of her, nobody will. He's got to take care of her, hasn't he?"

Eph looked from Jim to Ragan, puzzling. "Ain' he got tuh tek care o' dis country, too?" he demanded. "Why caint his maw tek in washin'?"

Ragan chuckled. "Don't you worry," he told Eph. "Jim here will go, when he can. Why, here, Eph. He wants to write this story about you so he can make extra money—get enough ahead so he can go . . . Enough to take care of his mother . . ."

Jim had turned hopelessly away. Eph looked at the boy's straight shoulders; and he looked at Ragan. And then the old darky did a surprising thing.

He crossed, and touched Jim's arm. "You, suh . . ." he said softly.

Jim looked at him. "I'm sorry," he said. "I won't bother you any more . . ."

Eph chuckled. "Lawdy, man, you cain' bother me. Listen . . . You come 'long home with me now. I aim tuh talk to you, some . . ."

Jim hesitated; he was surprised. Eph nodded. "You come 'long," he insisted, and took Jim's arm, and turned him about, and led the boy, half unwilling, across the street, past the tall old church, and up the hill.

Ragan scratched his head, watching them go, puzzled; and he wondered; and then he gave up the puzzle.

IV

There is some quality which possesses the soul of a good old negro that gives them a power not granted to other men. They have, above everything, the power to inspire confidence, to win confidences. Perhaps this is because of their simplicity, or because of their vast sympathy. White children in the South will love and trust their darky friends and will share with them those intimate secrets of childhood from which even parents are excluded. These old darkies have a talisman against the griefs that visit others; they soothe the sufferer, they murmur: "Nemmine, now chile," and the suffering is forgotten. In their own sorrows they wail and lament theatrically, and tear their hair and vent without restraint their primitive despair. But when white folks weep, the darky has comfort to give, and gives it. . . . To tell them a secret is like whispering it to one's own self; there is the bliss of confession without the anguish of knowing that one's shame is shared. It is easy to tell, hard to rebuff their gentle inquiries . . .

Jim Forrest was never able to understand how he had been led to unbosom himself to old Eph; but he did. The negro took him over Beacon Hill, and down one thin and dingy street, and then another; and so into a boarding house, and up to the room where Eph dwelt. This room was as clean as a new pin; it was meagerly furnished; yet it was comfortable. It was tiny, but it was large enough to be a home. Eph made Jim wel-

come there; he sat the boy down; he talked to him . . .

And Jim, who had come to hear Eph's story, found himself talking while Eph listened. And though he held his head high and steadily, there was in the boy's tones something of the longing that possessed him, something of the shame that oppressed him because he could not be out and doing like his fellows. Day broke and found them there together; and it was two hours after dawn before Jim left at last, comforted in a way he could not understand, cheered and content as he had not been for months, steady and unafraid . . .

He did not realize till that night that he had failed to get Eph's story.

Old Eph, when the boy was gone, sat down on his bed and put his head in his hands and thought hard. He was a shrewd old man, for all his simplicity; and the fruits of his thoughts were action. He knew what he wished to do, he considered only the method; and when this was chosen at length, he took his hat and went out, and up over the Hill, and down Beacon street to find the man he sought.

He waited humbly in an outer office till this man could see him. When he was admitted, he fumbled in his inner pocket for a dog-eared little bank book, and went in.

Jim Forrest, the day after, received a registered letter. This letter contained a check for eleven hundred dollars; and it read briefly:

"I am instructed by my client to hand you this check, and to inform you that there will be mailed, each week, to your mother, for an indefinite period hereafter, a check for ten dollars. I have no fur-

ther instructions, except to preserve absolute secrecy."

The letter ended in due legal form.

Jim, thereafter, did three things. The first was to go to the lawyer who had sent the letter and ask who had given the money. He got no answer. The second was to seek out old Eph and accuse him of sending it. At which Eph cackled joyfully.

"Lawdy, suh," the old darky chuckled guilelessly. "Where you think I gwine git 'leven hundred dollars. Don' you joke an old man, boy."

The third thing Jim did, when he gave up hope of discovering the identity of his benefactor, was to enlist.

V

One of the charms of old Eph's nightly performances at his chosen spot near the subway kiosk was that he never asked for money. The mercenary side of his activities was never prominent. It was his custom to remain, sitting cross-legged upon the paving, from beginning to end. He never rose to pass his hat or his palm solicitously among the listeners; and he never went so far as to set a tin cup or a similar receptacle invitingly beside him. If coins were tossed his way, he caught them with skinny fingers or inverted banjo; if none were tossed, no matter. Eph never complained.

But about the time Jim Forrest enlisted, it was remarked that old Eph began to grow greedy. At first he interspersed among his songs little half-caught remarks about the exceeding hard times;

the high cost of living, even for a dry old dorky; and the necessity of eating which possesses every man. A little later, he introduced the custom of passing his battered old hat out through the crowd. He never carried it from man to man himself; he simply tossed it to the nearest, and then broke into a gay and chuckling melody to hide his own confusion while it went from hand to hand and came back to him. Eventually, he fell into the habit of leaving his hat, bottom side up, upon the paving between his feet; and he referred now and then, in his songs, to the necessity for putting coins into it.

Some people who had known Eph for a good many years thought he was becoming miserly. They told stories, from man to man, about beggars of whom they had heard who owned half a dozen apartment houses out in Dorchester. And they quit coming to hear Eph sing. Others deplored the old man's avarice, but gave. Still others decided that the high cost of living must have hit Eph hard, and offered to help him.

All in all, his earnings did increase. His old, unbusiness-like arrangement had in the past sufficed. There was always a little money; there was sometimes a considerable sum. He might go home with one dollar, or two, or even five; or he might trudge up the hill with only a few pennies to show for his night's singing. On the whole, however, there had always been enough. He lived in some measure of comfort; and he laid up something for a rainy day. This hoard had been long years accumulating . . .

Eph told no one his troubles; no one had known

of his little wealth; no one knew that it was gone. Eph was bankrupt; and not only that, but he had mortgaged his earnings. He had pledged his future. He had given hostages to fortune. He had promised to find and send to Jim Forrest's mother the sum of ten dollars every week.

And in spite of the fact that in the past he had never averaged earning ten dollars a week, he proposed to keep his word.

He believed, in the beginning, that this would not be hard. He would have to demean himself, to ask for money, to invite gifts . . . The thought irked him; yet he was ready to do it. And to help out, he himself prepared to make sacrifices. Down in his boarding house, he gave up his comfortable little two dollar room and took another, in the very top of the house, which cost him half a dollar less. Likewise he cut down on his food. He gave up altogether the sliced, roast ham that had always been his delight; the occasional eggs; the bananas. He ate meagerly, and scouted the scolding insistences of his old colored landlady when she tried to force food upon him.

"I ain' no beggar, Mis' Hopkins," he told her, over and over. "When old Eph cain' pay his way, he gwine git out o' here to som'eres where he can."

In the beginning, matters went well enough. The people who stopped to listen to his singing opened their purses at his unwilling hints to them. He was able to take the promised ten dollars to the lawyer every week, and to live on what remained. And when he heard Jim Forrest was in the army, the old darky sang in a fashion that he

had not equalled for a dozen years, and the next day he boasted to his landlady of the matter.

"Ol' Eph ain' here, at all, Mis' Hopkins," he told her gleefully. "Y'all jes' thinks he is. He ain' here, I'm tellin' you."

She shooed him, with fat hands. "Go 'long, Eph, you ol' scamp," she scolded.

"I'm tellin' you," he repeated. "Eph ain' here. Ol' Eph's in de army, now. Ain' old Eph no more; he's a fine, stroppin' boy big enough to cut de Dutch. A fixin' tuh fight, Mis' Hopkins. A fixin' tuh fight!"

"Whut you tryin' let out, anyhow?" she demanded. "You sayin' somethin'; or is you jes' talkin' th'ough yore hat?"

"I'm tellin' you," he chanted. "Eph's in de army, now."

But he did not lay bare his secret to her, even then. Eph knew white folks. He knew that Jim Forrest wouldn't want it noised abroad that a nigger street singer was supporting his mother. And he kept his tongue in his head; but he exulted. He carried his old head high; and when he met on the street one day that Sergeant Hare who had refused him enlistment, Eph went into a fit of merriment that made the Sergeant think the old darky had gone witless.

"Dat man 'lowed he 'uz gwine keep me out o' dis here war," he boasted to Mis' Hopkins next day. "But I showed him. Old Eph showed whut 'uz whut."

"Yo're crazy," Mis' Hopkins told him scornfully. "Git out o' my way."

Eph told his lawyer, the next week, to ask Jim's

mother to give them word of Jim; and when she wrote, two weeks later, that the boy had been admitted to an officer's training camp, Eph danced on his bowed legs, and told Mis' Hopkins loftily that she would have to step lively now.

"Howcome?" she demanded.

"'Caze I'm an orf'cer now," Eph told her proudly.

"Yo're bughouse," she assured him. "De booby man'll git you."

Eph thought nothing of her word at that time; but two or three weeks later, it was repeated in a way that frightened him.

He had fallen into the habit of acting a little comedy of his own; a habit infinitely soothing to his soul. When he climbed the Hill every night, on his way home, he passed the Shaw Memorial, and he had always stopped to look at it. Now he fell into the habit of marching stiffly down the middle of the road to face the Memorial, and of coming to a halt there, standing at attention, and saluting after the ancient fashion of his Rebellion days. He used to fancy that the eyes in the sculptured faces of the marching soldiers turned sidewise to look at him; he used to imagine that the arm of the officer graven in the stone flicked upward in an answering gesture. And there were nights when he stood thus for a minute or two, speaking his thoughts aloud. . . .

Walter Ragan came upon him so, one bleak dawn in mid-November. Old Eph, very stiff and straight, was saying respectfully:

"Yas suh, Cunnel; I'se a soldier now. Ol' Eph. Yas suh; gwine tuh be an orf'cer, too."

Ragan called to him: "You, Eph, what are you doing out there?"

Eph saw the patrolman, and cackled. "Howdy, Miste' Ragan," he called.

"What are you up to, you old rascal?"

"Jes' makin' my reports to de Cunnel," said Eph gleefully. "Makin' my reports on a little matter."

"Look out, Eph," Ragan warned him. "You'll go bugs, next thing I know, and I'll have to ship you out to Waverly."

Now when Mis' Hopkins had warned Eph that he was showing symptoms of insanity, Eph had laughed; but Ragan's warning was another matter. Ragan, for all he was Eph's good friend, was a policeman, an arm of the law; and Eph had the negro's deep-rooted and abiding awe of the blue uniform and the helmet. Ragan's word hushed him instantly; and it chilled him with a sudden, cold fear . . .

That accumulated hoard of the years had been Eph's safeguard against old age. He had expected it would one day make him comfortable while he smoked, and sang, and waited his time to die; he had known it would always keep him out of the institutions he dreaded. But now it was gone; and when he thought of this fact, Eph felt stripped and defenseless and afraid. So now he was afraid; he hushed his mirth and touched his cap to Ragan.

"Yas suh," he said respectfully.

"Get along home to bed," Ragan advised him.

"I'm gone," said Eph; and he went.

Ragan, considering the matter afterward, won-

dered if old Eph's mind might not indeed be weakening. He decided to keep an eye on the darky.

He thought, during the next month, that Eph was aging. The old negro was growing thin; and Ragan guessed this might be the sudden wastage of age. But he was wrong. It was something distinctly more tangible. It was a matter of money, and of food.

Times were tightening purse-strings. There were a thousand calls for money besetting every man; and each had the high urge of country behind it. People who had never considered dollars before began to count pennies. A quarter thrown to Eph would buy a thrift stamp . . . And men, thinking this, returned the quarter to their pockets and turned away. Old Eph, after all, was only a beggar. No doubt he wasted his money on rum; or if not that, he must own at least one "three-decker" that brought him in fat rents. The legend of the wealth of beggars harassed Eph and was like to ruin him. He did his best; he labored manfully; he descended to covert pleadings . . .

One week in mid-December, he had only nine dollars and thirty cents on the appointed day. He borrowed the remaining seventy cents from the lawyer, and repaid the loan next day, in spite of that gentleman's insistence.

"Naw suh," Eph told him proudly. "Dis heah's my arrangement, suh. I'll manage. Lemme alone."

The next week he brought ten dollars; and the next. But for two days of that second week he ate nothing. He admitted this, in the bleak dawn,

when he stopped for a whispered colloquy with the stone figure of his old Colonel, at the Memorial.

"But dat ain' no matter, suh," he assured the inscrutable officer. "Dis ol' coon don' need tuh eat. Nothin' but skin an' bone, anyhow. Lawdy, suh, whut good is vittles tuh me?"

Cold had struck down on Boston in December; and it held and intensified as January came. Sometimes people, listening to Eph's singing, thought the old man must be shivering where he sat upon the stones; and Ragan drove him away two or three nights and bade him warm himself. But each time Eph looked at him with such pitiful entreaty against this kindness that Ragan gave up. "Have it your own way, you old idiot," he told Eph. "If you want to freeze, go ahead and freeze. But don't look at a man like he's kicked you . . ."

"Yas suh," said Eph. "Thank'e kindly, suh."

Neither Ragan, nor Eph's friend, the lawyer, realized how serious the matter was. They found Eph stubbornly determined to hold his own course; they decided he would not otherwise be content; and Eph was but one figure in their crowded lives. They let him have his way.

Eph duly met his obligations in the first week of that cold January; he was at his post through the second week. On the appointed day, he went to make the payment . . .

The lawyer had good news for him. Jim Forrest's mother wrote that Jim had won a commission in the training camp; he had won, by exceptional merit, a commission as Captain.

"You understand, Eph," the attorney explained, "this means he'll have a good salary, about two hundred dollars a month. So his mother can get along all right, now. . . ."

Eph's feet were shuffling on the floor in something that sounded very like a soft but jubilant hornpipe; he disregarded utterly the attorney's word. "My man's a captain, suh," he chanted. "An' I put him in where he c'ud be it. Same as if I 'uz a captain in de army, now. . . ."

"By Jove, Eph, you're right," the lawyer agreed. "I . . . I'd like to . . ."

There were tears in his eyes when he had shaken Eph's hand and seen him go; but there were no tears in old Eph. He was riotously happy, madly happy, tenderly happy . . . He went out, and down the street, and in the early dusk spread a newspaper on the cold stones of the pavement by the kiosk there, and sat him down, and lifted up his voice in song . . .

People said afterward that Eph had never sung so tunefully as that last evening. His voice had an unusual purity and sweetness; it was as tender as a woman's. There was an exaltation about the old man, so that the discerning eye seemed to see a glory hanging over him. He sang and sang . . .

That was a bitter cold night, and the streets cleared early. Ragan came along about one o'clock and found Eph still singing, with no one near to hear. He bade Eph stop and go home; but Eph protested:

"Please suh, Miste' Ragan; dis is my night tuh sing, suh."

Ragan, shivering in his warm garments, said

harshly: "This'll be your night to freeze to death. Get up and go home, before I run you in."

Eph got up. There was nothing else to do when a policeman commanded. And Ragan watched him cross the street, and called: "Good night."

Eph looked back and nodded. "Good night, suh," he echoed. "I'm gwine right along."

He started up Park street; and Ragan went on his way, trying the shop doors, huddling in the doorways to avoid the wind, blowing on his aching hands.

"By God, I don't see how the old fool stands it," he said to himself. "It's a wonder he's not stiff. . . ."

VI

Eph went up the Hill. Half way up Park street he looked back and saw Ragan disappearing; so when he came to the top, he felt safe in turning aside a little, to pause before the Memorial and report his triumph to his Colonel there.

He stood on the steps before the Monument, and took off his hat, and explained the matter very respectfully; and for all the howling of the wind that swept up the street and past him, he was sure he heard the low exclamations of his comrades in the stone ranks there; and he was sure the graven officer looked down at him, and spoke with him, and praised him. . . .

The night watchman, at the State House across Beacon street, reported afterward that he had thought, in the night, he heard the sound of martial music in the street out there. It might have

been a banjo, and an old man's voice; he could not be sure.

"But it sounded like a fife and drums to me," he said, again and again. "I came to a window and looked out; but I couldn't see a thing. . . . Thought I must have been dreaming . . . Went back to the fire . . ."

Whether it was old Eph's banjo, and old Eph's song he heard, or whether it was indeed the shrilling of invisible pipes, welcoming a hero home, I cannot say. He says it was The Battle Hymn of the Republic that he heard, so Ragan thinks it was only old Eph. But I am not so sure. . . .

At any rate, Ragan found Eph, in the morning. The old darky was huddled at the base of the Memorial, cuddling his banjo in his arms, while above his head the stone ranks marched interminably on.

Ragan and his lawyer between them decided to tell Jim Forrest the truth of the matter; and it was Jim who devised old Eph's epitaph. That which he caused to be set upon Eph's small, white stone was a familiar phrase enough; but glorious as simple things may be.

The legend on the stone reads:

"Old Eph."

"January 17, 1918"

"Dead on the Field of Honor"